Why "How to keep a humane society hospital out of your community should never have been written, page 38

DECEMBER 1990

veterinary economics

THE MAGAZINE OF PRACTICE MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE

IS YOUR RECEPTIONIST KEEPING CLIENTS OUT OF YOUR PRACTICE?

OR ARE YOU?

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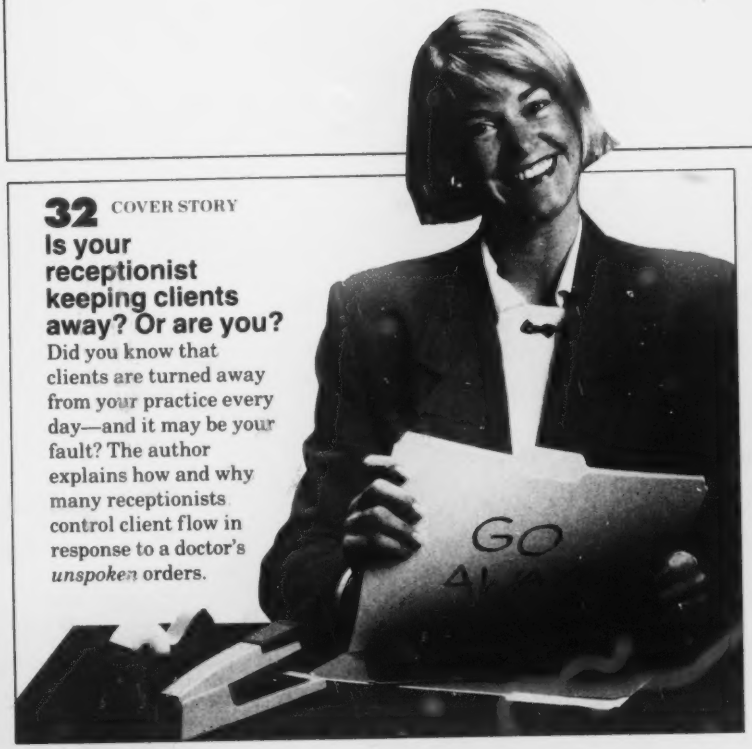
DECEMBER 1990



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Is your receptionist keeping clients away? Or are you?

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MEMO FROM THE EDITOR

The bond is real

Sam is my mom's cat, and he's at least 1,000 years old. She's had him forever, and he long ago secured his spot as her favorite kid. My brother, sister, and I don't worry too much about which one of us mom likes best, because we know the answer is Sam. Don't get me wrong, Sam actually makes a pretty good sibling. He's not bad company—if you're willing to crawl under the lamp shade with him. (It's warm under there, you know.)

Sam yowls at 4 o'clock every morning, and he doesn't stop until he figures out that mom is where she is every morning at 4 o'clock: sound asleep in bed. I guess he sleepwalks and loses his way, because at 4:15 or so, he's back—quietly asleep at her side. Even my dad has come to accept Sam's early morning pronouncements. He even does a pretty good imitation.

All of this is to say that Sam is a VIP. (And that's "P" for "person," not "pet." I don't think anyone has ever told him he's a cat.) Sam's status makes his veterinarians VIPs, too, because at 1,000-plus and counting, Sam needs to be careful about his health.

I'd hate to see Sam's chart at the Prairie Village Animal Hospital. I'm sure it covers pages and pages, including the time he took a flying but none-too-graceful leap from the bannister when I was in high school. Sam and my mom make the trip to the hospital regularly now, because Sam seems no better able to stay out of harm's way as an old man than he did as a kid. To prompt his latest visit, he fell out of a tree.

When mom and Sam go in for some new emergency, they *both* sit on the exam table. The doctors don't seem to mind, and I'm afraid mom would change doctors if they did. They all know Sam, and they know that he's a VIP.

My point in telling this story is this: The human-animal bond we all hear so much about is real. So is my mom's need for you to believe in that bond and practice accordingly. I don't think she's an unusual pet owner, and I know that she trusts and relies on Sam's doctors. We all do.

Becky Turner

Rebecca R. Turner

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atorium does not achieve its goal of zero growth —defined as the point at which PHS is killing only animals that are physically unable to survive—a program for mandatory spaying and neutering will be instituted.

The ordinance includes these provisions:

- During 1991, PHS will undertake an informational campaign to promote voluntary compliance with the moratorium.
- Violators will be given the option of paying a specified fine or providing proof that female animals were spayed within 90 days, and male animals neutered within 30 days. If the violator is unable to pay for the operation, PHS will provide the service, free.

According to supporter Nedim C. Buyukmihci, VMD, of the University of California at Davis, "One of the greatest tragedies in veterinary medicine is that, in effect, we kill a large percentage of our patients because nobody wants them. It is immoral to continue bringing dogs and cats into this world when we are killing as many as 10 million a year."

At press time, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors announced a public meeting to hear testimony on the breeding moratorium ordinance. VETERINARY ECONOMICS will report on the results as they become available. For more on the pet overpopulation problem, see page 38.

NET COMPARISONS

Use the chart below to determine how your net income compares to that of your colleagues.

Individual net income	Percent of DVMs
$125,000 or more	3.4%
100,000 - 124,999	4.8
80,000 - 99,999	9.4
70,000 - 79,999	6.6
60,000 - 69,999	7.4
50,000 - 59,999	9.4
40,000 - 49,999	12.8
30,000 - 39,999	17.2
20,000 - 29,999	19.8
15,000 - 19,999	3.7
Less than $15,000	5.5

Base: Full-time practicing veterinarians
Source: VETERINARY ECONOMICS' 1990 financial survey

NUTRITION PROGRAM LAUNCHED

How do you and your clients know if a certain pet food is providing complete and balanced nutrition? Look on the label, says the Pet Food Institute's board of directors, who recently voted unanimously to undertake a voluntary Nutrition Assurance Program based on the latest research and testing methods.

The self-regulated program will use animal feeding and digestibility tests and other accepted laboratory standards to assure you and the pet-owning public of the complete and balanced nutrition in pet foods. The test results will be placed on labels to help consumers make informed purchasing decisions.

Participating companies will submit affidavits certifying that their products have been tested by approved methods, and that the nutritional value is consistent with label claims. Products will be grouped in categories, and products in each category will be retested regularly.

An educational campaign—in coordination with the AVMA and AAHA—will promote the program and provide veterinarians and consumers with new information on nutrition.

TELEPHONE TIP

The impression your receptionist makes during the first six seconds of a phone conversation is crucial to your practice.

Remind her—and anyone else who answers the phone—not to allow a previous negative conversation to interfere with a new caller.

Nancy J. Friedman, The Telephone "Doctor," recommends that if you are in a bad mood for any reason, take a deep breath and regain your composure *before* you pick up the phone. ■

COMPUTER USAGE CLIMBS PAST THE HALFWAY MARK

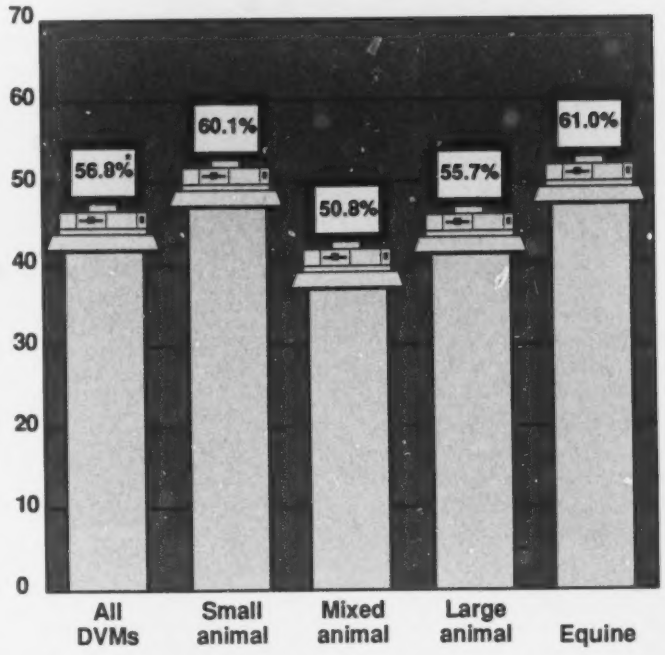
From 28 percent in 1987 to nearly 57 percent today, computer ownership among veterinarians is clearly on the rise. Here's a statistical look at who owns computers and how they put them to use.

By Kirsten Schroeder EDITORIAL INTERN

The latest VETERINARY ECONOMICS financial survey shows that more than 50 percent of veterinarians have computers in their practices—56.8 percent to be exact. The numbers are highest among equine practitioners, 61 percent of whom report having a computer.

The survey also shows that many young veterinarians jump right into computerized practices after graduating. Of doctors who've been in practice for less than two years, nearly 70 percent practice in computerized hospitals. Compare that to veterinarians who've been practicing for 21 years or more: Less than 45 percent of these doctors use computers in their practices.

EQUINE DOCTORS LEAD THE WAY IN COMPUTER OWNERSHIP



* Percentage of veterinarians who have computers in their practices.
Base: Full-time practicing veterinarians.

Making the most of it

As you'll see in the chart on page 48, computers are used primarily for their reminder-recall functions and for billing. Dr. Charles Cohen says that this finding is an indication that many veterinarians aren't fully utilizing the power they have with their computer systems. "Veterinary management software is but one ingredi-

ent," says Dr. Cohen, a computer consultant in Branford, Conn. "Veterinarians need to develop an interest and learn how to maximize their computer's capabilities.

"Literacy of the user is very important. He or she needs to know the importance of other features and programs such as utilities and word processing. The practice management features are great, but if that's all veterinarians are using, then they're not getting the best use from their system. They're only using 40 to 60 percent instead of 80 to 90 percent."

Philip Bradley manages the Bradley Veterinary Clinic in Lawrence, Kan., a practice in the midst of computerizing. Bradley agrees that, to function effectively, veterinarians must use their systems to do more than just print out invoices and reminder cards. "As manager, I like the fact that we won't have to do as much daily bookwork," he says. "From a single entry, we'll be able to generate many different records. Most important, though, we will better serve our clients."

Shop around

Allen Suggs is business manager of Animal Medical Clinics, which includes seven clinics in Jacksonville, Fla., and will soon include three more. From experience, Suggs says he feels that computers are a worthwhile investment —despite some expensive mistakes made in his practice.

"We spent about $50,000 trying out different systems, but the education involved was worth it,"

WHICH CAME FIRST: THE INCOME OR THE COMPUTER?

Gross practice income	Percent of DVMs in computerized practices
$50,000-$89,000	25.9%
$90,000-$149,000	34.3%
$150,000-$199,000	35.4%
$200,000 or more	67.4%

NEW GRADS TAKE THE COMPUTER PLUNGE

Number of years in practice	Percent in computerized practices
2 years or less	68%
3-5 years	56%
6-10 years	59.9%
11-20 years	60.9%
21 years or more	43.7%

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REMINDER FUNCTION TOPS LIST

Reminder-recall	82% *
Word processing	73.1%
Accounts receivable	77.1%
Billing	77.1%
Practice analysis	58.9%
Inventory	54.1%

* Percentage of veterinarians who use these computer functions.

MORE PRACTICES TO JOIN THE FOLD

All DVMs	44.3% *
Small animal	45.7%
Mixed animal	43.7%
Large animal	36.5%
Equine	50%

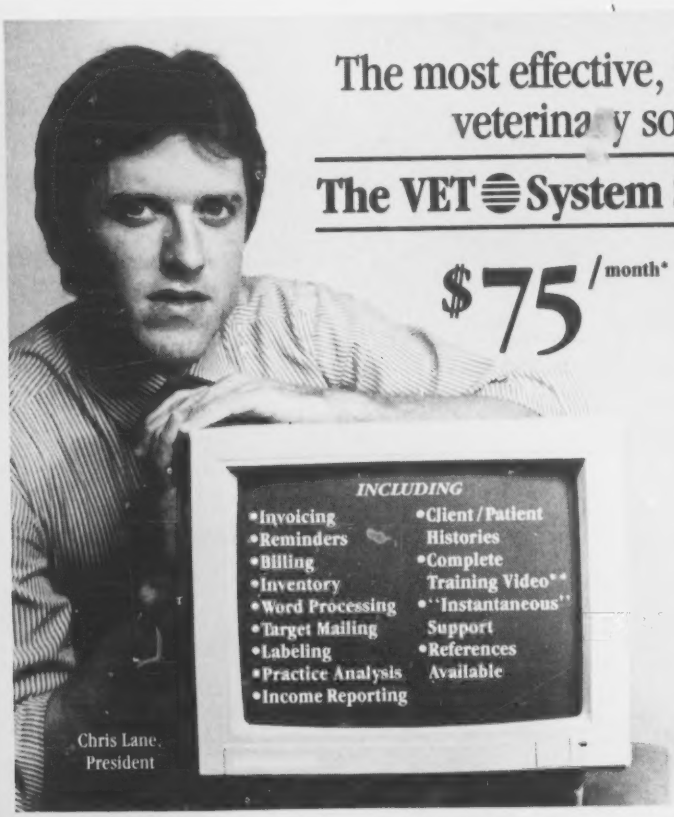
* Percentage of noncomputer owners who plan to buy a computer within two years.

Suggs says. "Our goal was to find the easiest system to use and learn; otherwise it would simply be a waste. Flexibility was another big factor. We searched until we found a company that was willing to structure certain forms the way we wanted them."

Editor's note: We'd like to hear what you think about the majority stance of computer-owning practitioners. Send your comments to VETERINARY ECONOMICS, *9073 Lenexa Dr., Lenexa, KS 66215.* ■

THE MORE CLIENTS, THE MORE COMPUTERS

Number of clients	Percent of DVMs in computerized practices
Less than 1,000	42.7%
1,000-1999	51.8%
2,000-2,999	55.3%
3,000-3,999	62.3%
4,000 or more	67.8%



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